DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 418 289 CE 076 223

AUTHOR	Hyman, Drew; Clinehens, Brad
TITLE	Seeking Common Ground: Deliberative Democracy and Sustainable Communities.
PUB DATE	1997-07-00
NOTE	35p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Conference of the Community Development Society (29th, Athens, GA, July 1997).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Action Research; Adult Education; Attitude Change; Case Studies; Citizen Participation; *Community Development; *Community Education; County Programs; *Democracy; *Participative Decision Making; Policy Formation; *Public Policy; Questionnaires; Regional Planning; Rural Areas; Rural Education; *Sustainable Development; Tables (Data)
IDENTIFIERS	*Local Issues Forums; National Issues Forum; Pennsylvania (Centre County)

ABSTRACT

Public deliberation, sometimes called deliberative democracy, offers alternatives to what are often adversarial governmental debates and hearings. This paper provides a case example of applying the deliberative democracy process to development issues and an analysis of data comparing the effectiveness of the process for creating a consensus for change. The case study was conducted in Centre County, Pennsylvania, which is a rural county consisting of 36 municipalities. Two local issues forums (LIF) that followed the practice of the National Issues Forums (NIF) were conducted in Centre County. The first LIF, Growth and the Quality of Life in Centre County, considered four visions of the county's future. The second LIF, held 19 months later, focused on the main issue emerging from the first forum: how to achieve a sustainable community of communities in the county. Pre- and post-forum questionnaires were distributed to all forum participants. The Centre County experience demonstrated that public deliberation based on the NIF model can provide a basis for moving communities toward consensus on issues of development, growth, and quality of life. A comparison of the pre- and post-forum questionnaires revealed definite directions of attitude change and considerable degrees of attitude change for a majority of participants. (Contains 19 tables.) (MN)

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Pennsylvania State University

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SEEKING COMMON GROUND:
DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Drew Hyman and Brad Clinehens
Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology
The Pennsylvania State University

Public deliberation, sometimes called deliberative democracy, offers contemporary alternatives to what are often adversarial governmental debates and hearings. By creating consensus-seeking opportunities for citizens and leaders, deliberative processes provide new arenas for citizen participation by addressing issues in collaborative ways to inform and empower the public policy process. Deliberative democracy seeks broader involvement of citizens and their representatives in considering public problems and solutions by offering an atmosphere of reasoned reflection and public judgment in comparison to advocacy-centered hearings and debates. Participants are asked to engage in a mutual exchange with others about their values, perspectives, and interests; they are offered the possibility of reframing the public dialogue in terms of common interests and mutually acceptable solutions. Sirianni and Friedland (1996) refer to this as an "open discovery process, rather than a ratification of fixed positions, and as potentially transforming interests, rather than simply taking them as given."

> . . . deliberative democracy does not assume that citizens have a fixed ordering of preferences when they enter the public sphere. Rather, it assumes that the public sphere can generate opportunities for forming, refining, and revising preferences through discourse that takes multiple perspectives into account and orients itself towards mutual understanding and common action. (Sirianni and Friedland: 1996)

Citizen input to the official public policy process is frequently characterized by one-way communications where citizens testify or present positions to officials. In such situations citizens typically feel the need to dramatize their positions and to focus on differences. The deliberative democracy movement discussed herein offers a collaborative

approach to informing the public policy process. Deliberative democracy thus complements and enhances the deliberations of governmental bodies providing a wider forum for discussion and collaboration about issues. Several contemporary applications have emerged. Environmental Dispute Settlement provides for deliberation among stakeholders rather than open community debates (Gray 1989). The Oregon Health Plan in 1990 used open community meetings to discuss underlying values and develop acceptable options. The deliberative poll of Fishkin (1995) involved representative panels of citizens in modeling what the electorate as a whole would think if it were immersed in intensive deliberative town meeting-type processes. Public issues forums and study circles (Mansbridge 1980, 1984; Matthews 1994) involve thousands of communities in deliberation of public policy choices. Hustedde (1996) examines the National Issues Forum (NIF) methodology, finding possibilities for "blending reason with local values" but little "linkage with the world of action."

This paper examines the public deliberation methodology for creating a series of Local Issues Forums (LIF) on Growth and the Quality of Life (NIFI 1996; Hyman, Steff and MacIsaac 1996). Centre County, Pennsylvania, a diverse constituency with 36 municipalities divided into seven planning regions provides a site for action research. This is a mostly rural locality which includes a small metropolitan area and several moderate-sized towns. Two forums, in March and November 1996, explored paradigms for change, strategies, techniques, and mechanisms for dealing with growth and the quality of life. The paper thus provides a case example of applying the deliberative democracy process to development issues and an analysis of data comparing the effectiveness of the process for creating a consensus for change.

Methodology

Both of the Centre County local issues forums followed the practice of the National Issues Forums (NIFI 1996) of administering pre-forum and post-forum questionnaires to participants. The questionnaires asked for participants' perspectives on the major public policy choices to be deliberated, opinions about how local officials were approaching these issues, how participants thought officials should be proceeding, and

several items about the forums themselves. Participants choose a four digit number and place it on both questionnaires as a basis for matching pre forum and post forum responses. This procedure guarantees confidentiality while providing a basis for comparing before and after responses. Identical numbers were selected in a few cases, and pre-post matching was achieved by comparing handwriting and ink/pencil on the two sets of questionnaires. The analyses below are drawn from data provided on these questionnaires.

The following sections present citizens responses on the following variables: (a) how representative are the participants of the general citizenry; (b) value perspectives on growth and development; (c) perceptions of government involvement; (d) citizens preferences on the degree of government involvement; (e) approaches to sustainability and quality of life in local communities; (f) learning and opinion formulation as a result of the forum; and (g) the desirability of local issues forums for involving citizens in public policy.

National (or Public) Issues Forums (NIF)

National Issues Forums (NIF) is public policy discussion program that for the last decade and a half has been providing opportunities for citizens to deliberate current issues. e.g. Social Security, crime, youth violence, drugs, affirmative action, family values, governing America. Modeled after traditional town meetings, forums are organized by community civic, service and religious organizations, public libraries, high schools and colleges. Forums are intended to increase public understanding of complicated topics and courses of action, provide a nonpartisan overview of each topic, provide opportunities for citizens, leaders and officials around the nation to gather and deliberate on the most challenging public issues of the day. Forums typically use issue booklets prepared by the Kettering and Public Agenda Foundations. The forums are organized by various groups to examine the pros and cons of policy choices and their underlying values and motivations. Groups can be formed in many settings: schools, churches, senior centers, libraries, service or community groups. The National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI) indicates that there are more than 5,000 communities and organizations using the National Issues Forums' process.(NIFI 1996) Each local group is organized and

operated independently. The guiding principle behind NIF, deliberative democracy, is operationalized as follows:

> If American democracy is to fulfil its promise, citizens must take responsibility and act together. They can act directly or through their representatives but they must act. The first order of business then is to come together to make choices about what actions they can agree to take. Sound choices come from our most reflective and shared judgments, not the first reactions so often documented by pollsters. What is required is public deliberation, a process through which people talk with one another about public issues that concern them, weigh the advantages and consequences of alternative courses of action and seek a shared sense of direction for creating public policy. This process is carried out in deliberative forums across the country (NIFI 1996).

Local Issues Forums (LIF)

At the local level, some groups use NIF methodologies and materials to address issues on the local agenda, and thus move from deliberation to action. In the case to be examined, Local Issues Forums (LIF) seek to engage local citizens and leaders in understanding different perspectives on development, appreciating their implications for public policy and governance, and considering the types of strategies that might be required to move in a given direction. As noted by Hyman, Steff and MacIsaac (1996), deliberative democracy is the guiding principle of the Local Issues Forums. Thus, a Local Issues Forum *is not* a debate. It is not a place where advocates argue the merits of their position seeking to "defeat" other voices. A Local Issues Forum *is* a place where all perspectives are welcome, and it provides an opportunity for participants to share how they see the future emerging with friends and neighbors, leaders, and government officials. Forums seek to hear all local voices, to consider the major policy choices on an issue, and to work toward a shared direction for public policy.

> Local Issues Forums promote the idea that citizens create change through our organizations, our communities, our businesses, our votes,

and our daily interactions with others. We can make Centre County families and Centre County communities a priority for local, state, and national attention. We can demand high quality levels of health, education, cultural, economic, political, environmental, and social well-being. This Local Issues Forum is one piece of the puzzle (Hyman, Steff and MacIsaac 1996).

The LIF Process

In Centre County, the process begins in the local Centre County National Issues Forum Steering Committee, the local group that handles policy issues and plans for the National Issues Forums held locally. (Any local group of citizens and/or leaders could perform this function.) This committee also considers local forums from time to time and responded to a suggestion of three of its members to organize one on development and growth. Following the decision to have a local issues forum, the process is as follows:

1. **Initiation**: Co-conveners are appointed by the local NIF Steering Committee, they are charged with creating a task force, and suggestions are made for possible task force members.
2. **Creation of a LIF Task Force:** The co-conveners and interested members of the NIF steering committee brainstorm a list of local people who they consider to represent the different interests related to the topic. In this case, local officials, planners, developers, environmentalists, human services, education, nonprofit organizations, concerned citizens, neighborhoods, transportation and other infrastructure interests, etc. were identified. This list is refined, prioritized, and personal contacts are made to invite participation. People who decline are asked to suggest others who might become involved. Task Forces tend to number 15-25 people.
3. **Task Force Responsibilities**: LIF task forces generally meet once a month for discussing policy issues and implementing the forum. Task Force members are also expected to take responsibility for one or more of the activities of the forum and/or to recruit others to assist in the following tasks:

a. *Preparation of Materials*: Local issues forums need to prepare materials similar to the booklets provided by Kettering for national issues forums. In Centre County this includes identifying the policy choices to be deliberated, preparation of a booklet explaining the choices and rationale pro and con on each, and background information related to the topic. The booklets also contain copies of the guest columns printed in the newspaper.

b. *Guest Columns in the Local Newspaper*: In Centre County the local newspaper is a co-sponsor of both the local and national issues forums. Part of its contribution is printing of guest columns written by local citizens on each of the policy choices about two weeks before the forum. The intention here is to put a local flavor on the deliberation, interest people in attending, and highlight participation of local notables.

c. *Publicity and the Media*: People attend because they know about and are interested in forum topics. Centre County has been able to get considerable support from the media. Task Force members take responsibility for the following: Guest columns in the newspaper and follow-up letters to the editor on the issues. C-NET Forum: a one hour round table by a panel of spokespersons for each of the policy choices on the local cable network. Radio Forums: A radio talk show on the Wednesday preceding the forum with call-in questions, and a post-forum radio round table. C-NET also video tapes one of the small groups for later broadcast and copies are placed in community libraries and the community education office of the schools. Local newsletters and bulletins also often include announcements and commentary.

d. *Pre-Forum and Post-Forum Questionnaires*: A "ballot" is used to gauge perspectives before and after the forum. The data reported below are derived from these questionnaires. Task force members design and analyze the questionnaires for a final report.

e. *Logistics*: Arrangements for such a meeting are sometimes complex. In Centre County, the school district's Community

Education program is a co-sponsor and facilitates the logistics, space and location, and other arrangements. Forums pay for direct costs through voluntary contributions from the community which provide funding for direct costs for postage, printing, refreshments and other specific items. A continental breakfast is provided at registration before the forum at no charge to participants. A light lunch is made available at cost or participants may bring their own lunch.

f. *Moderators*: Most deliberation takes place in small groups. Moderators are recruited and trained to guide the groups through the process.

4. **Pre-Forum Outreach and Publicity**: Forums are announced in the local media well in advance. In addition, about two weeks before the forum the guest columns on the policy choices are printed in the local newspaper. The C-NET and radio talk shows are also broadcast during this period. Pre-registrants may pick up issue booklets for review.

5. **Forum Day**: The typical agenda for a forum is as follows:

8-9 a.m. Registration and Continental Breakfast. Local organizations and agencies may have displays.

9-9:30 a.m. Welcome to the Forum and overview of the policy choices.

9:30-noon Small Group Deliberation of the issues. The process asks participants to first indicate their stake in the issue and then to discuss their understanding of the policy choices one at a time. Lists of comments are recorded on flip charts.

Noon-1 p.m. Lunch and informal discussions.

1-2:30 p.m. Small Group Deliberation and Seeking Common Ground. Areas of agreement and disagreement from the morning are summarized and moderators guide participants toward identifying areas where they can achieve consensus.

2:30-3 p.m. Small Groups Report and Overall Common Ground. Meeting again in a large group, the small

group reports are heard and commonalities identified.

6. **Post-Forum Activities.** Following the forum a committee compiles results and prepares a brief report. This report is provided to participants and is also sent to officials of all local municipalities, state representatives, the media, and local groups. A report is printed in the local newspaper. A round table discussion of the forum and its findings is also broadcast on a local radio station. The Task Force meets once again to review and authorize the report and consider further action. If a subsequent forum is proposed, a recommendation is made to the Steering Committee which then forms a new Task Force (which may contain members of the previous task force). This latter process allows people to be invited to be Task Force members with a time-limited one-forum commitment.

WHO ATTENDS: CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

Role in the Community. While not asked on first forum questionnaires, participants in the second forum were asked about their role in Community. Of the participants, 63 percent say they are a citizen and not a leader, developer, official or government employee; 14 percent say community leader; 7 percent developer, 7 percent official, and 9 percent government employee. Thus, as desired by the organizers, the attendees are primarily citizens or persons not otherwise involved in making decisions on growth and development in the community. At the same time, there is good representation among the leadership of the community.

Locality The geographic scope of the forum, who should be invited, and who participates in forums were key issues identified by the LIF Task Force during the planning process. Several people noted that since forums were held in the borough of State College, and that most growth is in this municipality and four surrounding townships, the audience should be limited to them. Others contended that the real choices involve the whole county of 36 municipalities and all should be included. The latter prevailed and publicity was directed County-wide.

Table 1

Community Identification of LIF Participants

What do you consider to be your "community"?		
	Forum 1 %	Forum 2 %
COUNTY OR MULTI-MUNICIPALITY REGION		
Centre County	30	30
Centre Region	21	22
Other Region	10	8
MUNICIPALITY OR NEIGHBORHOOD		
State College Borough	17	14
Other Townships or Boroughs	12	16
"Neighborhood" (no specification)	2	5
Other	5	5
Not available	3	0

Community Identification. Table 1 shows the community identification of LIF participants for both Forum 1 and Forum 2. It shows that participants were a diverse group of people who identify with different localities. While about four out of ten identify the Centre Region or State College as their community, it is notable that three out of ten consider themselves to be residents of the County rather than a specific region, township or borough. This is true for both forums. These results were surprising to most people and have been interpreted by local leaders to support the idea that future forums and community planning should look beyond townships and boroughs.

Table 2

Length of Residence in the County of LIF Participants

Q9. How long have you lived in Centre County?		
	Forum 1 %	Forum 2 %
0-4 years	14	15
5-9 years	17	14
10-14 years	10	13
15 years or more	59	58

Length of Residence. Table 2 shows that the majority of forum attendees have lived in the county for 15 years or more. However, many attendees at both forums included people who lived in the county for less than a year to four years, 5-9 years and 10-14 years. The proportions of different age groups is similar for both forums.

Prior Forum Participation. Another concern of the LIF Task Force was the idea that the same people always show up at both national and local issues forums. Table 3 shows this not to be the case. About half of the people at each forum say they have not attended either a local or national issues forum before. On the one hand, this means that the forum process was reaching new people--a plus from the perspective of the Task Force and local leaders. On the other hand, it means that many people who attended Forum 1 did not attend Forum 2--creating an issue of continuity between the forums. In fact, moderators noted the new people as a "problem," for they needed to be "brought up to speed" which detracted from the deliberation of the second forum.

Table 3
Prior Attendance at Local or Public Issues Forums in this Community

Q10. Have you attended a Local Issues Forum or Public (National) Issues Forum in this community before?		
	Forum 1 %	Forum 2 %
No	51	47
Yes, 1-3 times	34	45
Yes, 4-6 times	10	3
Yes, 7 or more times	5	5
Not Sure	0	0

Social Background. The gender, age and education distributions also suggest that this was a diverse group of participants. Some idea of how representative participants are of the population is possible through comparing percentages of participants to the 1990 census. Table 4 shows that Forum 1 had identical percentages of females and males when

compared to the census. Forum 2 had a smaller percentage of females. In general, however, both genders were well represented in the forums.

Table 4
Gender of LIF Participants

Q7. Are you male or female?			
	1990* Census	*Forum 1* %	*Forum 2* %
1. Female	47	47	37
2. Male	53	53	63

*Three major zip code areas from which about 8 of ten participants were drawn.

All ages were also represented although the age distribution of participants is skewed considerably toward older citizens. The younger age groups are highly under represented. This is a college town which inflates the number of people in the 18-29 age group, many of whom are students who do not expect to remain in the community after graduation. The young adult group, ages 30-49, was fairly well represented. Over half of the participants were 50 years of age and above. Thus, the majority of voices heard in the forums were those of the more mature citizens of the community.

Table 5
Age of LIF Participants

Q5. How old are you?			
	1990* Census	***Forum 1* %**	***Forum 2* %**
1. 17 or younger	n/a	2	2
2. 18-29	61	7	12
3. 30-49	23	36	34
4. 50-64	9	29	25
5. 65 or older	7	26	27

*Three major zip code areas from which about 8 of ten participants were drawn.

All levels of education were represented, but the distribution is skewed toward those with higher education. Table 6 shows that the education of

LIF participants is considerably higher than that of the general population of the community. College graduates significantly outnumber the other categories of participants in terms of education. Note, however, that both forums had similar percentages of participants with high school degrees or less and some post high school (some college and associate degrees). Involving citizens from all levels has been identified as a concern.

Table 6
Education of LIF Participants

Q6. How much schooling have you completed?			
	1990* Census	*Forum 1* %	*Forum 2* %
Elementary/Secondary	18	8	9
Some post high school	47	11	9
College graduate	20	29	33
Graduate school	15	52	49

*Three major zip code areas from which about 8 of ten participants were drawn

The Results of Deliberation

Forum 1: The Choices. In March 1996, the first Centre County Local Issues Forum on *Growth and the Quality of Life in Centre County* considered four visions of the future for the County. Over 250 people explored strategies, techniques, specific programs and mechanisms that could be used to work toward common perspectives. This was a deliberative dialogue about several different perspectives on community change and development. Citizens who participated in the Forum had opportunities to prepare through a series of articles in the *Centre Daily Times* and an extensive Forum booklet provided free of charge on the background of growth and planning in Centre County. Community-wide discussion was also fostered by radio and television programs on WRSC, WPSU-FM and C-NET, the government education channel.

Participants in the forum held on March 30, 1996, gained an appreciation of the implications for public policy and governance and the types of strategies that might be required to move in a given direction. Four perspectives were identified by the Task Force as the major

approaches or visions that different citizens of Centre County see as desirable directions for community change.

Perspective 1: The Status Quo was favored by those who believe that Centre County has the benefits of a small-town atmosphere and the advantages of a mini-metropolitan area. But, they say, it's disappearing fast. As identified in the booklet, *"this perspective identifies a process wherein a coalition of developers, land owners, corporations, the University, and outside investors are promoting growth that is destroying the rural community character of the County. Growth is bringing traffic jams, pollution, and unanticipated demands on infrastructure, community systems and environmental resources. These people see increased crime and social problems as a result. They believe that unrestrained growth places new and unanticipated demands on schools, fire, safety, police, welfare and human services agencies. Maintaining the status quo means finding ways to restrain development and keep our rural communities intact."* (Hyman, Steff and MacIsaac 1996)

Bob Eberhart and Gene Bazan wrote columns for the newspaper from this perspective. On the one hand, Bob Eberhart suggested that bigger (growth) is not necessarily better. Rather, maintaining our communities may mean restraining growth to retain the "Happy Valley" ambience in some municipalities while others could benefit from growth in investments and jobs. On the other hand, Gene Bazan challenged all four perspectives suggesting that if we are to extend the status quo by creating a high-quality community atmosphere for the future, major changes in both our perspectives and our ways of living are required. Citizens' comments and topics for consideration regarding *Perspective 1* identified in the small group sessions included:

Maintain this unique community
Lack of controls
Green space, zoning, threat to state land
Crime, congestion, cars
Effects of I-99 on clean air, noise pollution
Airport relocation
University growth as engine of change
Village atmosphere region
Moratorium on building
Assess limits of natural resources
Do not accept all opportunities--spread them out
Consider all towns communities in planning

Perspective 2: Economic Growth: The Free Market Model was advocated by those who seek to sustain and enhance growth. From this perspective, the County has the opportunity to create a dynamic major metropolitan center in north-central Pennsylvania. *"Supporters of this perspective would continue to build the infrastructure needed for growth: expand the airport, upgrade sewer and water facilities, and create high-speed highway and rail links to allow business and industry to compete in a global economy. This perspective would promote a high-tech research environment and encourage outside firms to locate here. Governmental and environmental restrictions would be examined and changed to assure that they do not deprive landowners of opportunities to profit from development. Above all, supporters of this perspective believe we need to attract investors, create jobs, and encourage more efficient development of the land and natural resources."* (Hyman, Steff and MacIsaac 1996)

Chuck Mong's column in the newspaper spoke to this perspective but not without reservation. He noted the business community is not interested in unbridled growth, but rather a healthy and growing economy while preserving natural resources. This perspective sees upgrading our transportation facilities and infrastructure leading to job creation that eventually benefits all groups. Citizens' comments and topics for consideration regarding *Perspective 2* identified in the small group sessions included:

Nonuniformity in municipal controls
Growth can be positive.
Effect of becoming a" tourist Mecca."
Economically one region, politically patchwork.
Enjoy big town advantages, arts, intellectual.
"Bedroom communities."
Incentives for companies.
Land is for profit--history of county.
Too much focus on government today.
Diverse growth will lessen any single force.
Growth and transportation systems linked.
Politicians influence growth decisions.
Benefits to land owners and developers.
Define "efficient development."

Perspective 3: Sustainable Communities: Emphasizing the Quality-of-Life for Centre County Residents was favored by those who believe that growth provides opportunities on the one hand and threatens

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to destroy the small town character of local communities on the other. *"This perspective recognizes unguided and uncontrolled growth often benefits a few at the expense of the many, in effect lowering their quality-of-life. Supporters of this perspective emphasize that different parts of the County have different needs. They believe we ought to create a diverse and creative mosaic--a unique and innovative Community of Communities--in central Pennsylvania. They support finding ways for guiding and directing change so that it improves the quality of life of everyone while protecting the environment. Above all, supporters of this perspective believe we must restrain efforts that place additional costs on the broader community, and require development activities to meet the criteria for improving the quality of life for all major groups and residents of Centre county."* (Hyman, Steff and MacIsaac 1996)

Jim Strauss, in writing from this perspective, challenged us to recognize the quality of our natural environment and the opportunities made available by multiple small towns are good reasons why people choose to live here. Our small communities exist not because someone planned it that way but because growth has not encroached on them. He noted that now we are threatened with pollution and environmental degradation and portents of urban growth that may destroy what we hold most dear. Above all, supporters of this perspective stressed the need to seek strategies for controlling and directing growth so that the quality of life is improved for all. Citizens' comments and topics for consideration regarding *Perspective 3* identified in the small group sessions included:

More community input.
Controls could be positive for developers.
Need for parks, etc. in plans.
Consider natural resources--land, water, air.
Consolidate services.
Communities compliment each other.
Articulate community values.
Plan/Manage for ALL folks.
Individual and government partnership.
Visionary, proactive, guiding.
Assist communities to maintain quality-of-life.
Build community to direct growth.

Perspective 4: Dealing with Embattled Downtowns was shared by those who believe that the problem is not growth but unbalanced growth. From this perspective, core business districts are declining relative to the peripheries--which are growing. *"Supporters of this perspective saw shopping malls and discount centers springing up in outlying areas as decimating our downtown business districts. Traditional neighborhoods are declining as investors convert family homes to rentals. They saw the tax base eroding as smaller percentages of businesses and residents pay taxes in our boroughs. From this perspective, development on the periphery creates increasing demands for infrastructure, maintenance and services. Supporters of this perspective believe that we need to find ways to protect and enhance our downtowns as centers for shopping and community interactions."* (Hyman, Steff and MacIsaac 1996)

Candace Dannaker's column in the *Centre Daily Times* suggested that growth has changed our downtowns into a "kaleidoscope of patterns" caused by the "boxes of commerce" that are springing up around our towns. On the one hand, she suggested that "the boxes have won," and our traditional downtowns are gone forever. On the other hand, she saw a future of Centre County downtowns with a variety of forms. Some may become tourist or shopping centers filling a particular niche. Others have possibilities for becoming centers for culture, crafts and conversation. Supporters of this perspective noted that downtowns may be decimated but opportunities for renewal and integration into a broader perspective abound. Citizens' comments and topics for consideration regarding *Perspective 4* identified in the small group sessions included:

Current growth/policy hurting downtowns.
Lost supermarket, department store, etc.
Parking a problem.
Cannot go back--adaptation/renewal necessary.
May only serve "niches."
Redesign use of space--don't throw away.
Tax incentives for historic preservation.
Township vs. Boro tax base issues.
Rail lines to enhance infrastructure.
Malls/big boxes are different.

Forum 1: Citizens Preferences for the Four Perspectives. Citizens' preferences on the desirability of these perspectives for Centre County were provided in pre- and post-Forum ballots. Table 7 shows the percentages for the ratings of participants on the desirability of the four perspectives for Centre County. By the end of the forum, most participants thought that *Perspective 3: Sustainable Communities* is the most desirable. Almost 80 percent gave this a "very desirable" rating of 4-5. This perspective would condition change to that which benefits the overall quality-of-life. People were less in agreement with *Perspective 2: Economic Growth,* with the highest proportion giving this choice a score of three. Few thought it desirable to maintain the status quo--*Perspective 1.*

Table 7

Forum 1: Pre-Post Forum Perspectives on Growth and the Quality of Life

Q1&Q12. Here are four perspectives on growth and the quality of life which might be used to guide community change and public policy. To what extent do you think these are desirable or undesirable as ways to approach development activities?

Very Undesirable ..... ***Very Desirable***

WE OUGHT TO: pre/post	*DK*	*0*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
1. Find ways to keep the community like it is now--stop growth.	0.0 .8	20.0 24.1	20.4/ 24.1	14.9 19.6	23.4 12.5	12.0 6.3	9.1 11.6
2. Promote economic growth to create jobs and investment.	0.6 0.9	6.9 14.3	8.6 11.6	9.2 17.9	35.1 35.7	24.1 14.3	15.5 5.4
3. Restrain growth to allow only develop-ment that benefits the overall community	0.6 0.9	3.4 0.9	4.6 1.8	2.9 2.6	21.7 14.9	27.4 24.6	39.4 54.4
4. Protect and enhance our downtowns as centers for shopping and community interaction.	0.0 0.0	0.6 1.8	3.4 5.4	3.4 3.6	11.4 19.8	27.4 34.2	53.7 35.1

Forum 1-Participants thus concluded that Centre County is at a crossroads. The community is a traditionally rural area on the verge of becoming a major urbanized area. Without clear directions for policy and community action, economic forces happenstance, outside interests and political influence will decide the outcome. Efforts must address not only economic growth but the full range of community life including health, social, educational, cultural, recreation, infrastructure, housing, and environmental systems. The Task Force agreed that the first forum provided the impetus and direction for a second forum focusing on the sustainable community-of-communities perspective. The first task force disbanded and a new one was created with about one-third of the membership agreeing to serve.

Forum 2: The Choices. In November 1997, the second county-wide Local Issues Forum, focused on the main issue that emerged from the first forum: ***How can we create a sustainable community of communities in Centre County?*** It included over 200 participants from many Centre County communities who considered ways for all communities to work together. Forum II explored three possible futures as alternative strategies for action. The "Issue Map" at the end of the paper was included in the pre-conference booklet provided to participants.

The task force for Forum II identified three "possible futures" as strategies for creating the future. Participants explored all three futures and engaged in a deliberative dialog toward deciding whether any one, or aspects of several, should guide change. The three choices, labeled possible futures, were identified through long deliberations of the Task Force. Written versions were drafted by three citizens, Jim Knauer, Chris Uhl, and Gene Bazan.

Possible Future 1: Individual Choice and Expanding Economic Opportunity would trust individual decisions in the marketplace to achieve sustainability and a high quality of life. It would encourage continued economic growth in the County with a concern for increasing jobs, investment, and protecting the environment. Citizens' comments and topics for consideration identified in the small group sessions included:

Increased public input to manage growth: "The public is not holding up their end of the bargain."

Attracts market-driven quality of life resources.

Unanimous rejection of scenario one (recognizing that market conditions play a role).

Geographic flexibility in growth management.

Expand participation in the decision making process.

Sprawl

Sewage disposal problems.

This model would intensify problems.

Basically short-term benefits with long-term liabilities.

Takes away community citizens opportunities for input.

Possible Future 2: Strengthening Local Communities (Social Capital) suggests that only concerted community action will achieve sustainability and a high quality of life. It seeks to change the direction of development toward a County-wide mosaic of interrelated communities. It would have us create quality-of-life criteria for the human and natural environments to guide and manage proposed changes. Citizens' comments and topics for consideration identified in the small group sessions included:

Need better communication and trust between the municipalities.

Too restrictive to be realistic.

Expand "Clean and Green" program.

Use water and sewer management to control growth.

Best likelihood for balance among competing forces.

Best redirects growth throughout the County.

Enhances dialogue and decision-making among all.

By controlling sprawl, development is directed to the best interests of neighborhoods and communities.

Directs economic development to those that want it and away from those that don't.

Need to be continued forums on different issues at different places in the County.

Possible Future 3: Ecological Sustainability envisions significant changes in lifestyle directed toward long-term ecological sustainability and quality of life. It would encourage us to decrease our reliance on nonrenewable resources and to increase local self-reliance. The "clean, healthy, friendly" principle would be used to set performance milestones for our land use policies, zoning ordinances, and building codes in order to reduce our "ecological footprint." Citizens' comments and topics for consideration identified in the small group sessions included:

Increased public holding up their end of the bargain."
Best achieves sense of community.
Better long-term decisions on growth and traffic.
Preserves natural landscape.
Lacks equity region-to-region unless there is a compensation agreement.
Complicates logistics of commuting.
Uses least land for development.
Requires major investment in pubic transit.
Best addresses future generations' needs.
Encourages community education and awareness.

Forum 2: Citizens' Preferences for the Three Strategies for Change. In the pre-post forum questionnaires, participants were asked a series of questions about their preferences for the three strategies for dealing with growth and the quality of life. The majority of participants emphasize the importance of the second and third choices which address concerted community action and a commitment to ecological sustainability as the most desired strategies for pursuing a high quality of life and sustaining Centre County communities. A minority believes that individual choice and expanding economic growth will produce sustainability and a higher quality of life. The main change from pre to post questionnaires was an increase in the percentage seeing the second choice as the most desirable strategy (See Table 8). Small group reports suggest that economic growth should be directed to those areas that want it and away from others. Common ground appears to be manifest most in the idea of sustainability based on broad community interaction quality-of-life indicators.

Table 8

Forum 2: Pre-Post Forum Preferences on Approaches to Change

Table 1. Here are three approaches to achieving a sustainable "community of communities" and a high quality-of-life. Indicate whether you think these are desirable or undesirable as ways for designing a future for Centre County? **Very Undesirable.....Very Desirable**							
WE OUGHT TO: (Percent responding...)	0	1	2	3	4	5	Tota l
1. Rely on individual choice and expanding economic opportunity in the marketplace to achieve sustainability and a high quality of life.	212 3	303 4	171 7	181 0	101 1	3 5	99% 100 %
2. Rely on concerted community action to create quality-of-life criteria for evaluating proposed changes to achieve sustainability and a high quality of life.	0 0	1 2	7 2	201 7	332 6	39 53	100 %10 0%
3. Rely on a commitment to ecological sustain ability based on our reducing our "ecological footprint" to set milestones for change to achieve sustain- ability and a high quality of life.	1 1	2 1	7 11	232 2	322 2	34 43	99% 100 %

DO PERSPECTIVES CHANGE

One of the main questions asked about the LIF process is whether any change occurs in the opinions and perspectives people bring to the forum. The data presented in the preceding two sections show that change does occur during forums. Not all changes are in the same direction. Some people find certain choices to be less desirable and others more desirable and vice versa. In general, the Centre County forums tended to lead people toward finding the "Community of Communities" idea more

desirable after the first forum. In Forum 2, consensus moved toward "Strengthening Local Communities," the social capital approach compared to either the market model or ecological footprint.

Tables 9 and 10 provide information on the percentage of participants who changed (either up or down) from the pre-forum to post-forum questionnaires and those who made the same choices at both points. The tables show the percentage of people whose responses on the items went down, no change, or went up, and the average amount of change (on a scale of 5). About half of the participants in the forums change their opinions on the items (45% to 58%) in one direction or the other. Table 9 shows that he greatest shifts for Forum 1 are away from choices 1 and 2 and toward choice 3. These data supported the decision to focus on strategies for choice 3 for the second forum. Table 10 shows the greatest shifts for Forum 1 are to find choice 1 less desirable and choices 2 and 3 more desirable. These data confirm experiential impressions gained by organizers and participants during the forum and are being used to support additional forums based on a combination of choices 2 and 3.

Table 9

Forum 1: Pre to Post Forum Changes in Participants Perspectives

Choice	Dn%/Avg. Dn	No Change	Up %/Avg Up
1.	39/1.5	42/0	19/2.0
2.	48/1.8	40/0	12/1.7
3.	20/1.5	53/0	27/1.9
4.	38/1.3	52/0	10/1.4

Table 10
Forum 2: Pre to Post Forum Changes In Participants Views on Strategies

	Dn%/Avg. Dn	No Change	Up %/Avg Up
1.	33/1.7	46/0	21/1.4
2.	13/2.0	54/0	33/1.4
3.	20/2.0	55/0	24/1.5

The Centre County experience suggests that public deliberation on the NIF model can provide a basis for moving a community toward consensus on issues of development, growth, and the quality of life. Both first-hand experience and analysis of the pre-post forum questionnaires show definite directions of change and considerable degrees of change for the majority of participants. Specifically, the average amounts of change range from 1.3 to 2.0 on a 5.0 scale; this represents shifts of from 25% to 40% on ratings of the desirability of the choices. Clearly the deliberative process had an impact on the majority of the participants.

PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES ABOUT DECISION MAKERS ACTIONS

The data are also revealing when we look at citizens' perspectives on how the community is now being developed and managed. Tables 11 and 12 show participants views of how the three strategies are reflected in the way the community is being developed for Forum 1 and Forum 2 respectively. Most Forum 1 participants believed that local decision makers are trying to promote economic growth to create jobs and investment. They said leaders are not pursuing the other choices to significant degrees. Similarly, most Forum 2 participants believed that community leaders and developers are approaching growth from the individual choice and economic growth perspective. Conversely, they said

leaders are giving only moderate consideration to concerted community action based on quality of life, and the ecological sustainability positions. These ideas were reflected in group reports which suggest the "market" perspective does not address their concerns and would intensify them. Most report that the community mosaic best addresses their concerns. While recognizing the "idealism" of this position, they felt that if we do not set high expectations, the desired future can never be a possibility.

Table 11

Forum 1: Pre-Post Forum Opinions on how the Community is Now Developed and Managed

Q2 & Q13. Look again at question #1. How much do you think each perspective is actually reflected in the way our community is now being developed and managed? *Very Little ..... Very Much*							
DECISION MAKERS ARE TRYING TO:	*DK*	*0*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
1. Find ways to keep the community like it is now--stop growth.	4.0 2.7	20.8 27.0	39.3 34.2	14.5 17.1	12.7 11.7	4.6 4.5	4.0 2.7
2. Promote economic growth to create jobs and investment.	2.9 3.5	1.7 1.8	6.9 4.4	10.3 11.5	24.6 29.2	31.4 36.3	22.3 13.3
3. Restrain growth to allow only development that benefits the overall community	3.4 1.7	10.9 8.6	24.1 20.7	23.0 30.2	21.8 24.1	13.2 4.3	3.4 10.3
4. Protect and enhance our downtowns as centers for shopping and community interaction.	2.3 1.8	3.4 5.3	17.7 12.4	34.3 30.1	21.1 25.7	14.3 21.2	6.9 3.5

Table 12

Forum 2 Pre-Post Forum Opinions on how the Community is Now Developed and Managed

Table 2. Look again at question #1. How much do you think each approach is actually reflected in the way our community is now being developed and managed? **Very Little.....Very Much**							
DECISION MAKERS ARE TRYING TO: (%	0	1	2	3	4	5	Total
1. Rely on individual choice and expanding economic opportunity in the marketplace to achieve sustain ability and a high quality of life.	0 1	8 5	10 7	14 17	30 42	37 28	99% 100%
2. Rely on concerted community action to create quality-of-life criteria for proposed changes to achieve sustainability and a high quality of life.	3 2	10 14	29 29	33 34	21 16	3 5	99% 100%
3. Rely on a commitment to ecological sustainability based on reducing our "ecological footprint" to set milestones for change to achieve sustainability and a high quality of life.	12 15	35 29	24 28	22 17	5 8	2 3	100% 100%

Table 13

Forum 1: Managing Change--Percentage Changing

Choice	Dn%/Avg. Dn	No Change	Up %/Avg Up
1.	28/2.3	48/0	29/2.2
2.	36/1.3	45/0	20/1.6
3.	22/1.4	45/0	33/2.0
4.	27/1.2	38/0	36/1.8

Table 14
Forum 2: Managing Change--Percentage Changing

Choice	Dn%/Avg. Dn	No Change	Up %/Avg Up
1	29/1.7	50/0	22/1.6
2	31/1.7	42/0	27/1.3
3	29/2.5	40/0	31/1.3

PARTICIPANTS PERSPECTIVES ABOUT WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

The question on how development *is* being managed was followed by one on how it *should be* managed. Participants were asked about the extent local government should be involved in the management of community growth, protection of the environment, and the quality of life Centre County communities. Table 15 shows that the overwhelming majority, over 60 percent, favor increased levels of regulation and government involvement to promote quality of life. Contrary to common belief that we are in a time of reducing government involvement, very few advocate reducing regulations and government involvement in these areas. Forum 2 shows a similar pattern. The largest percentage, over 40 percent, say local governments should increase levels of regulation and involvement to promote community quality of life. Another 24 percent felt that the local government should increase levels of regulation and involvement in ecological sustainability.

Table 15

Forum 1: Pre-Post Forum Opinions on How Development Should Be Managed

Q3 & Q14. How active do you think local government should be in managing community growth, protection of the environment, and the quality of life in Centre County communities? Do you believe we should:	
1.Reduce current regulation and government involvement in these areas. PRE POST	6.5 2.6
2. Keep the current levels of regulation and government activity related to growth.	17.6 12.3
3. Increase levels of regulation and government involvement to promote quality of life.	60.6 68.4
4. Adopt policies to increase government involvement to promote growth and development.	12.4 14.9
Other Missing/Not Available/Not Applicable	3.0 1.8

Thus, as occurred in Forum I, there is a difference between what participants prefer, what they believe decision makers are doing, and what they believe should be done. In addition, group reports stress the need for planning on a multi-municipality or county-wide basis. Suggestions include a central authority in the County, a County-wide referendum to set up a non-partisan commission, or joint municipal planning. The need to act "before more excessive development occurs" is a common theme.

Table 16

Forum 2: Pre-Post Forum Opinions on How Development Should be Managed

Table 3. How active do you think local government should be in managing community growth, protection of the environment and the quality of life in Centre County communities? (Percent responding ...)	
1. Reduce current regulation and government involvement in these areas. PRE POST	9 7
2. Keep the current levels of regulation and government activity related to growth and the quality of life.	12 11
3. Adopt policies to increase government involvement to promote growth and economic opportunity.	7 5
4. Increase levels of regulation and government involvement to promote community quality of life.	40 45
5. Increase levels of regulation and government involvement to promote ecological sustain ability.	27 22
6. Combination of Lines #4 and #5	5 22

Table 17

Forum 1: Pre-Post Forum Statements on How Informed Participants Say They Are

Q4 & Q15. Which statement best describes how you now feel about issues related to growth and the quality of life?	
1. I feel that I am uninformed about these issues PRE POST	11.4 7.8
2. I have a general sense of these issues but do not have a position	22.2 12.1
3. I understand these issues but do not have a position	14.2 5.2
4. I understand these issues and I do have a position	52.3 75.0

BECOMING INFORMED ON THE ISSUES

Are Local Issues Forums a good place to discuss and become informed on public issues? The percentage of participants who say they now understand the issues and have a position increased from 52 percent to 79 percent during Forum 1 and from 59 percent to 78 percent During Forum 2. The percentages of people who feel uniformed or do not have a position decreased accordingly. (Tables 17 and 18.)

Table 18

Forum 2: Pre-Post Forum Opinions on How Informed Participants Say They Are

Q4 & Q15. Which statement best describes how you now feel about issues related to growth and the quality of life?	
1. I feel that I am uninformed about these issues. PRE POST	4.0 1.7
2. I have a general sense of these issues but do not have a position.	24.7 10.8
3. I understand these issues but do not have a position.	12.0 9.2
4. I understand these issues and I do have a position.	59.3 78.3

In terms of what participants would like to change, some regretted lack of participation by other Centre County residents, and that the allotted time was too short to cover all the growth-related issues. Group reports reflect the idea that increased public support is essential to effectively dealing with growth. Concern was expressed about public apathy and the need for greater input to public decision making. Better communication between municipalities and some mechanism for increasing coordination between municipalities got support. Above all, there is strong support for addressing sustainability and the quality of life for communities throughout the region.

SUPPORT FOR ADDITIONAL FORUMS

The post-forum surveys also reveal strong support for moving ahead in planning for additional forums in different regions and County-wide forums on specific topics. About eight out of ten say there should be more forums and they would plan to attend, and most of the remainder say there should be more and they might attend.

Table 19

Forum 1: Support for Additional Forums

Forum 1 **Q. In your opinion, should there be more forums related to this topic in the future?**		**%**
	Forum 1	Forum 2
1. Yes, there should be more and I would plan to attend.	82	79
2. Yes, there should be more and I might attend.	16	17
3. Yes, there should be more and I would probably not attend.	3	2
4. No, I don't think more forums related to this topic are needed.	0	2

Finally, when asked to give general comments about the Forum, participants say they enjoyed the participation, deliberation, and presentations, learning about new ideas and information, meeting other people and gaining a general understanding of these issues. Most thought that the presentation and leadership were well organized.

CONCLUSIONS

Deliberative democracy as implemented through the Local Issues Forums is providing a path through the adversarial debates that occur in so many of our local governments, hearings and commissions. The outcomes of these forums are not binding decisions for that is the role of

local government and community organizations. Forums are a place for deliberating questions we hear people asking. In the Centre County scenario, issues include the implications of more shopping centers and "big box" retailers, new mines and quarries, additional housing developments, upgrading Rt.. 220 to I-99, expanding the airport to allow big jets, preservation of forests, farms, and streams, the future of downtowns and neighborhoods. The forums explored strategies for guiding and controlling the future. They addressed the need to find ways for guiding and directing development that improves the quality of life while protecting the environment and restraining efforts that place unwanted costs on the broader community.

In the Centre County case, the first forum examined alternative visions of the future. Using materials and a booklet created by the home-grown Local Issues Forum on Growth and the Quality of Life Task Force, participants of the first forum concluded that efforts must constrain and redirect economic growth and address explicitly the quality of life including health, social, educational, cultural, recreation, infrastructure, housing, and environmental systems. The second forum explored three paradigms as strategies for *action: Individual Choice and Expanding Economic Opportunity; A Sustainable Mosiac of Diverse Communities*; and, *Ecological Sustainability*. The analyses of data from pre-post forum questionnaires suggest that the Local Issues Forums on Growth and the Quality-of-Life in Centre County provided a process which allowed a diverse group of participants to move toward consensus on major public policy questions. Value perspectives on growth and development were aired and clarified. Perceptions of government involvement were identified and preferred perspectives discussed. Post-forum surveys show a shift in perspectives toward a preferred option and the emergence of a consensus among most participants. Contrary to popular expectations, 84 percent asked for increased government regulation and involvement. In both forums, there was a notable difference between what participants prefer, what they believe decision makers are doing, and what they believe should be done. Post-forum surveys find about eight out of ten supporting more forums and they would plan to attend, and most of the remainder say

there should be more and they might attend. This experience suggests that Local Issues Forums can provide a non-confrontational process for citizens and leaders for becoming informed on public issues and seeking common ground.

At the same time important questions remain to be answered. The forum participants are a combination of invited and self-selected citizens. Whether their perspectives and opinions reflect the broader citizenry is a question for further research. The data show considerable change occurring in some participants and not in others. Just who changes and who does not was not answered herein although further analyses will explore this issue. Perhaps the key issue raised is whether this form of deliberation leads to change or not. Forums are voluntary activities designed to inform and deliberate. The hope is that citizens will become informed and empowered to participate in the many regular avenues of change, and leaders will gain new insights and directions. Interviews with local leaders suggest that the deliberative forums are having an impact. Planners and leaders see things differently and are moving in directions different from before the forums. At the same time, many express consternation about the lack of direct ties to decision making in the community. Both time and further research are needed to answer these questions.

In summary, we believe the analyses herein show that the LIF methodology is a way for leaders, citizens and officials to deliberate sensitive public issues without the acrimony and conflict that so frequently attend public discussion and debate. It has provided a bridge to the future for this county of many communities, old and new, small and large, some gathered in towns and neighborhoods, some spread across regional landscapes. It brings home the fact that if we want to have some control over what happens to our own communities, if we want to change the direction of development away from uncontrolled urban like sprawl, we must begin thinking differently about our communities and our governments. The methodology of deliberative democracy pushes us to clarify our values and confront essential truths while seeking common ground among diverse interests. It is not a panacea. It does suggest that

with the right kind of deliberative collaboration and constructive local activism we can create paths to a sustainable future.

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